TWO DISCOURSES:

THE FIRST,

Of *Evil-Speaking*:

By His Grace,

JOHN, late Lord Arch-Biſhop of *Canterbury*.

The Second, Of

The Government of the Thoughts:

By His Grace,

JOHN, Lord Arch-Biſhop of *York*.

Both Preach'd before Their Majeſties, 1694.

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A SERMON againſt *Evil-Speaking*.

By His Grace

JOHN, late Lord Arch-Biſhop of *Canterbury*.

TIT. III. 2.

To ſpeak evil of no man.

GEneral Perſuaſives to Repentance and a good Life, and Invectives againſt Sin and Wickedneſs at large, are certainly of good uſe to recommend Religion and Virtue, and to expoſe the deformity and danger of a Vicious courſe. But it muſt be acknowledged on the other hand, that theſe general Diſcourſes do not ſo immediately tend to reform the Lives of men: Becauſe they fall among the Croud, but do not touch the Conſciences of particular Perſons in ſo ſenſible and awakening a manner as when we treat of particular Duties and Sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and to reclaim them from the other, by proper Arguments taken from the Word of God, and from the nature of particular Vertues and Vices.

The *general* way is, as if a Phyſician, inſtead of applying particular Remedies to the Diſtemper of his Patient, ſhould entertain him with a long diſcourſe of Diſeaſes in general, and of the pleaſure and advantages of Health; and earneſtly perſuade him to be well; without taking his particular Diſeaſe into conſideration, and preſcribing Remedies for it.

But if we would effectually reform men, we muſt take to task the great and common diſorders of their Lives, and repreſent their faults to them in ſuch a manner as may convince them of the evil and danger of them, and put them upon the endeavour of a cure.

And to this end I have pitched upon one of the com-

mon and reigning Vices of the Age, *Calumny* and *Evil-ſpeaking*; by which men contract ſo much guilt to themſelves, and create ſo much trouble to others: And from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. For *who is he*, ſaith the Son of *Sirach*, *that hath not offended with his tongue?* Ecclus. 19. 16. *In many things*, ſaith St. *James*, James 3. 2. *we offend all: And if any man offend not in word, the ſame is a perfect man.*

But how few have attain'd to this Perfection? And yet unleſs we do endeavour after it, and in ſome good meaſure attain it, all our pretence to Religion is vain: So the ſame *Apoſtle* tells us, James 1. 26. *If any man among you ſeemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's Religion is vain.*

For the more diſtinct handling of this Argument, I ſhall reduce my Diſcourſe to theſe *Five* Heads.

Firſt, I ſhall conſider the Nature of this Vice, and wherein it conſiſts.

Secondly, I ſhall conſider the due extent of this Prohibition, *To ſpeak evil of no man.*

Thirdly, I ſhall ſhew the Evil of this practice, both in the *Cauſes* and *Effects* of it.

Fourthly, I ſhall add ſome further Conſiderations to diſſuade men from it.

Fifthly, I ſhall give ſome Rules and Directions for the prevention and cure of it.

I. I ſhall conſider *what this Sin or Vice of evil ſpeaking, here forbidden by the Apoſtle, is*: μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, not to defame and ſlander any man, not to *hurt his reputation*, as the *Etymology* of the word doth import. So that this Vice conſiſts in ſaying things of others which tend to their diſparagement and reproach, to the taking away or leſſening of their Reputation and good Name. And this, whether the things ſaid be true or not. If they be falſe, and we know it, then it is down-right *Calumny*; and if we do not know it, but take it upon the report of others, it is however a *Slander*; and ſo much the more injurious, becauſe really groundleſs and undeſerved.

If the thing be true, and we know it to be ſo, yet it is a defamation, and tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's

bour's reputation: And it is a fault to ſay the evil of others which is true, unleſs there be ſome good reaſon for it beſides: Becauſe it is contrary to that charity and goodneſs which *Chriſtianity* requires, to divulge the faults of others, though they be really guilty of them, without neceſſity or ſome other very good reaſon for it.

Again, It is *Evil ſpeaking* and the Vice condemn'd in the *Text*, whether we be the firſt Authors of an ill Report, or relate it from others; becauſe the man that is evil ſpoken of is equally defam'd either way.

Again, Whether we ſpeak evil of a man to his face, or behind his back: The former way indeed ſeems to be the more generous, but yet is a great Fault, and that which we call *Reviling*: The latter is more mean and baſe, and that which we properly call *Slander* or *Backbiting*.

And Laſtly, Whether it be done directly and in expreſs terms, or more obſcurely and by way of oblique inſinuation; whether by way of down-right reproach, or with ſome crafty preface of commendation: For ſo it have the effect to defame, the manner of addreſs does not much alter the caſe: The one may be more dextrous, but is not one jot leſs faulty: For many times the deepeſt Wounds are given by theſe ſmoother and more artificial ways of Slander; as by asking queſtions, *Have you not heard ſo and ſo of ſuch a man? I ſay no more, I only ask the queſtion:* Or by general intimations, that *they are loth to ſay what they have heard of ſuch a one, are very ſorry for it, and do not at all believe it*, if you will believe *them:* And this many times without telling the thing, but leaving you in the dark to ſuſpect the worſt.

Theſe and ſuch like Arts, though they may ſeem to be tenderer and gentler ways of uſing mens reputation, yet in truth they are the moſt malicious and effectual methods of Slander; becauſe they inſinuate ſomething that is much worſe than is ſaid, and yet are very apt to create in unwary men a ſtrong belief of ſomething that is very bad, though they know not what it is. So that it matters not in what faſhion a Slander is dreſs'd up, if it tend to defame a man and to diminiſh his Reputation, it is the Sin forbidden in the *Text*.

II. We will conſider *the extent of this Prohibition to*

ſpeak evil of no man; and the due *bounds and limitations of it*. For it is not to be underſtood abſolutely, to forbid us to ſay any thing concerning others that is bad. This in ſome caſes may be neceſſary and our duty, and in ſeveral caſes very fit and reaſonable. The Queſtion is, In what Caſes by the general Rules of Scripture and right Reaſon we are warranted to ſay the evil of others that is true?

In general, we are not to do this without great reaſon and neceſſity; as, for the prevention of ſome great evil, or the procuring of ſome conſiderable good to our ſelves, or others. And this I take to be the meaning of that advice of the Son of *Sirach*, Eccl. 19. 8. *Whether it be to a friend or a foe, talk not of other mens lives; and if thou canſt without offence, reveal them not*; that is, if without hurt to any body thou canſt conceal them, divulge them not.

But becauſe this may not be direction ſufficient, I ſhall inſtance in ſome of the principal Caſes wherein men are warranted to ſpeak evil of others, and yet in ſo doing do not offend againſt this Prohibition in the *Text*.

Firſt, It is not only lawful, but very commendable, and many times our duty to do this in order to the probable amendment of the perſon of whom evil is ſpoken. In ſuch a caſe we may tell a man of his faults privately; or where it may not be ſo fit for us to uſe that boldneſs and freedom, we may reveal his faults to one who is more fit and proper to reprove him, and will probably make no other uſe of this diſcovery but in order to his amendment. And this is ſo far from being a breach of Charity, that it is one of the beſt teſtimonies of it. For perhaps the party may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him, and then it is a kindneſs to give him the opportunity of vindicating himſelf: Or if he be guilty, perhaps being privately and prudently told of it he may reform. In this Caſe the Son of *Sirach* adviſeth to reveal mens faults; *Eccluſ.* 19. 13, 14, 15. *Admoniſh a friend*, ſays he, *it may be he hath not done it; and if he have done it, that he do it no more: Admoniſh a friend, it may be he hath not ſaid it; and if he have, that he ſpeak it not again: Admoniſh a friend, for many times it is a ſlander; and believe not every tale.*

But

But then we muſt take care that this be done out of kindneſs, and that nothing of our own paſſion be mingled with it; and that under pretence of reproving and reforming men, we do not reproach and revile them, and tell them of their faults in ſuch a manner as if we did it to ſhew our *Authority* rather than our *Charity*. It requires a great deal of addreſs and gentle application ſo to manage the buſineſs of Reproof, as not to irritate and exaſperate the perſon whom we reprove, inſtead of curing him.

Secondly, This likewiſe is not only lawful, but our duty, when we are legally called to bear witneſs concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuſer, unleſs the publick good, or the prevention of ſome great evil ſhould require it. And then the plain reaſon of the thing will ſufficiently juſtifie a voluntary accuſation: otherwiſe it hath always among well-manner'd People been eſteemed very odious for a man to be officious in this kind, and a forward Informer concerning the miſdemeanors of others. *Magiſtrates* may ſometimes think it fit to give encouragement to ſuch perſons, and to ſet one bad man to catch another, becauſe ſuch men are fitteſt for ſuch dirty work: But they can never inwardly approve them, nor will they ever make them their friends and confidents.

But when a man is call'd to give teſtimony in this kind in obedience to the Laws, and out of reverence to the Oath taken in ſuch Caſes, he is ſo far from deſerving blame for ſo doing, that it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth, or any part of it.

Thirdly, It is lawful to publiſh the faults of others in our own neceſſary defence and vindication. When a man cannot conceal another's faults without betraying his own innocency, no charity requires a man to ſuffer himſelf to be defamed to ſave the reputation of another man. *Charity begins at home*; and though a man had never ſo much goodneſs, he would firſt ſecure his own good name, and then be concern'd for other mens. We are *to love our neighbour as our ſelves*; ſo that the love of our ſelves is the Rule and Meaſure of our love to our neighbour: And therefore *firſt*, otherwiſe it could not be the *Rule*. And it

would be very well for the World, if our Charity would riſe thus high; and no man would hurt another man's reputation, but where his own is in real danger.

Fourthly, This alſo is lawful for caution and warning to a third perſon, that is in danger to be infected by the company, or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced by repoſing too much confidence in him, having no knowledge or ſuſpicion of his bad qualities: But even in this caſe we ought to take great care that the ill character we give of any man be ſpread no farther than is neceſſary to the good end we deſigned in it.

Beſides theſe more obvious and remarkable Caſes, this Prohibition doth not I think hinder, but that in ordinary converſation men may mention that ill of others which is already made as publick as it well can be: Or that one friend may not in freedom ſpeak to another of the miſcarriage of a third perſon, where he is ſecure no ill uſe will be made of it, and that it will go no further to his prejudice: Provided always, that we take no delight in hearing or ſpeaking ill of others: And the leſs we do it, though without any malice or deſign of harm, ſtill the better; becauſe this ſhews that we do not feed upon ill reports, and take pleaſure in them.

Theſe are the uſual Caſes in which it may be neceſſary for us to ſpeak evil of other men. And theſe are ſo evidently reaſonable that the Prohibition in the *Text* cannot with reaſon be extended to them. And if no man would allow himſelf to ſay any thing to the prejudice of another man's good name, but in theſe and the like Caſes, the tongues of men would be very innocent, and the World would be very quiet. I proceed in the

III*d.* place, to conſider *the evil of this practice*, both in the *Cauſes* and the *Conſequences* of it.

Firſt, We will conſider the *Cauſes* of it. And it commonly ſprings from one or more of theſe evil Roots.

Firſt, One of the deepeſt and moſt common *Cauſes* of *evil ſpeaking*, is *ill nature* and cruelty of diſpoſition: And by a general miſtake, *Ill nature* paſſeth for *Wit*, as *Cunning* doth for *Wiſdom*; tho' in truth they are nothing a-kin to one another, but as far diſtant as *Vice* and *Vertue*.

And there is no greater evidence of the bad temper of Man-

Mankind, than the general proneneſs of men to this Vice. For (as our *Saviour* ſays) *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh.* And therefore men do commonly incline to the cenſorious and uncharitable ſide: which ſhews humane Nature to be ſtrangely diſtorted from its original rectitude and innocency. The Wit of man doth more naturally vent it ſelf in *Satyr* and Cenſure, than in Praiſe and *Panegyrick.* When men ſet themſelves to commend, it comes hardly from them, and not without great force and ſtraining; and if any thing be fitly ſaid in that kind, it doth hardly reliſh with moſt men: But in the way of *Invective*, the Invention of men is a plentiful and never-failing Spring: And this kind of Wit is not more eaſie than it is acceptable: It is greedily entertained and greatly applauded, and every man is glad to hear others abuſed, not conſidering how ſoon it may come to his own turn to lie down, and make ſport for others.

To ſpeak evil of others, is almoſt become the general entertainment of all Companies: And the great and ſerious buſineſs of moſt Meetings and Viſits, after the neceſſary Ceremonies and Complements are over, is to ſit down and back-bite all the World. 'Tis the *Sawce* of Converſation, and all Diſcourſe is counted but flat and dull, which hath not ſomething of *piquancy* and ſharpneſs in it againſt ſome body. For men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good, and are ſecretly pleas'd with ill reports, and drink them in with greedineſs and delight; though at the ſame time they have ſo much Juſtice, as to hate thoſe that propagate them; and ſo much Wit, as to conclude that theſe very perſons will do the ſame for them in another Place and Company.

But eſpecially, if it concerns one of another *Party*, and that differs from us in matters of Religion; in this Caſe, all Parties ſeem to be agreed that they do God great ſervice in blaſting the Reputation of their Adverſaries: And tho' they all pretend to be *Chriſtians*, and the *Diſciples* of *Him* who taught nothing but *kindneſs*, and *meekneſs*, and *charity*; yet it is ſtrange to ſee with what a ſalvage and murderous diſpoſition they will flie at one anothers Reputation, and tear it in pieces: And whatever other *Scruples* they may have, they make none to beſpatter one another

another in the moſt bitter and ſlanderous manner.

But if they hear any good of their Adverſaries, with what nicety and caution do they receive it? how many objections do they raiſe againſt it? and with what coldneſs do they at laſt admit it? *It is very well*, ſay they, *if it be true; I ſhall be glad to hear it confirm'd. I never heard ſo much good of him before. You are a good man your ſelf, but have a care you be not deceived.*

Nay it is well, if to balance the matter, and ſet things even, they do not clap ſome infirmity and fault into the other Scale, that ſo the Enemy may not go off with flying Colours.

But on the other ſide, every man is a good and ſubſtantial Author of an ill Report. I do not apply this to any one ſort of men, tho' all are to blame in this way; *Iliacos intra muros peccatur, & extra.* To ſpeak impartially, the *Zealots* of all *Parties* have got a *ſcurvy Trick* of lying for the Truth.

But of all ſorts of People, I have obſerved the *Prieſts* and *Bigots* of the Church of *Rome* to be the ableſt in this way, and to have the ſtrongeſt Faith for a luſty Falſhood and Calumny. Others will bandy a falſe Report, and toſs it from one hand to another; but I never knew any that would ſo hug a Lye, and be ſo very fond of it. They ſeem to be deſcribed by St. *John* in that expreſſion in the Revelation, *Whoſoever loveth and maketh a lye.*

Another ſhrewd ſign that *ill nature* lies at the root of this *Vice* is, that we eaſily forget the good that is ſaid of others, and ſeldom make mention of it; but the contrary ſticks with us, and lies uppermoſt in our memories, and is ready to come out upon all occaſions: And which is yet more ill-natur'd and unjuſt, many times when we do not believe it our ſelves we tell it to others, with this charitable Caution, *That we hope it is not true.* But in the mean time we give it our *Paſs*, and venture it to take its fortune to be believed or not, according to the charity of thoſe into whoſe hands it comes.

Secondly, Another Cauſe of the commonneſs of this Vice is, that many are ſo bad themſelves, in one kind or other. For to think and ſpeak ill of others is not only a bad thing, but a ſign of a bad man. Our *Bleſſed Saviour*, ſpeaking

ſpeaking of the evil of the *laſt days*, gives this as the reaſon of the great decay of Charity among men; *Becauſe iniquity ſhall abound, the Love of many ſhall wax cold*, Mat. 24. 12. When men are bad themſelves, they are glad of any opportunity to cenſure others, and are always apt to ſuſpect that evil of other men which they know by themſelves. They cannot have a good opinion of themſelves, and therefore are very unwilling to have ſo of any body elſe; and for this reaſon they endeavour to bring men to a level, hoping it will be ſome juſtification of them, if they can but render others as bad as themſelves.

Thirdly, Another ſource of this Vice is *Malice* and *Revenge*. When men are in Heat and Paſſion they do not conſider what is true, but what is ſpiteful and miſchievous; and ſpeak evil of others in revenge of ſome injury which they have received from them: And when they are blinded by their Paſſions, they lay about them madly and at a venture, not much caring whether the evil they ſpeak be true or not. Nay, many are ſo *Deviliſh* as to invent and raiſe falſe Reports on purpoſe to blaſt mens Reputation. This is a *Diabolical* temper, and therefore St. *James* tells us, that the ſlanderous *Tongue is ſet on fire of Hell*: And the *Devil* hath his very *Name* from *Calumny* and falſe Accuſation; and it is his *Nature* too, for he is always ready to ſtir up and foment this evil ſpirit among men: Nay, the *Scripture* tells us, that he hath the malice and impudence to accuſe good men before God; as he did *Job*, charging him with *Hypocriſie* to God himſelf; *Who*, he knows, *does know the hearts of all the children of men*.

Fourthly, Another *Cauſe* of evil ſpeaking is *Envy*. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and think that their Reputation obſcures *them*, and that their commendable qualities do ſtand in *their* light; and therefore they do what they can to caſt a cloud over them, that the bright ſhining of their Vertues may not ſcorch *them*. This makes them greedily to entertain, and induſtriouſly to publiſh any thing that may ſerve to that purpoſe, thereby to raiſe themſelves upon the Ruins of other mens Reputation: And therefore as ſoon as they have got an ill Report of any good man by the end, to work they preſently

ſently go to ſend it abroad by the firſt *Poſt*: For the ſtring is always ready upon their Bow to let fly this Arrow with an incredible ſwiftneſs, through *City* and *Country*; for fear the innocent man's juſtification ſhould over-take it.

Fifthly, Another *Cauſe* of evil-ſpeaking is *Impertinence* and *Curioſity*; an itch of talking and medling in the affairs of other men, which do no wiſe concern them. Some perſons love to mingle themſelves in all buſineſs, and are loth to ſeem ignorant of ſo important a piece of *News* as the *faults* and *follies* of men, or any bad thing that is talk'd of in good Company. And therefore they do with great care pick up ill Stories, as good matter of diſcourſe in the next Company that is worthy of them: And this perhaps not out of any great malice, but for want of ſomething better to talk of, and becauſe their Parts lie chiefly that way.

Laſtly, Men do this many times out of *wantonneſs*, and for *diverſion*. So little do light and vain men conſider, that a man's Reputation is too great and tender a Concernment to be jeſted withal; and that a ſlanderous Tongue *bites like a Serpent*, and *wounds like a Sword*. For what can be more barbarous, next to ſporting with a man's Life, than to play with his Honour and Reputation, which to ſome men is dearer to them than their Lives?

It is a cruel pleaſure which ſome men take in worrying the Reputation of others much better than themſelves; and this only to divert themſelves and the Company. *Solomon* compares this ſort of men to diſtracted perſons; *As a mad man*, ſaith he, *who caſteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, ſo is the man that deceiveth his neighbour*; the LXX render it, *So is the man that defameth his neighbour, and ſaith, Am I not in ſport?* Such, and ſo bad are the Cauſes of this Vice. I proceed to conſider in the

Second place, the ordinary, but very pernicious *Conſequences* and *Effects* of it; both to *Others*, and to *our Selves*,

Firſt, To *Others*; the Parties I mean that are ſlander'd. To them it is certainly a great *injury*, and commonly a high *Provocation*, but always matter of no ſmall *grief* and *trouble* to them.

It is certainly a great *injury*, and if the evil which we ſay of them be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and beyond all poſſible reparation. And though we

ſhould

ſhould do our utmoſt endeavour afterwards towards their Vindication, yet that makes but very little amends; becauſe the Vindication ſeldom reacheth ſo far as the Reproach, and becauſe commonly men are neither ſo forward to ſpread the Vindication, nor is it ſo eaſily received after ill impreſſions are once made. The ſolicitous Vindication of a man's ſelf is, at the beſt, but an *after-game*; and for the moſt part a man had better ſit ſtill, than to run the hazard of making the matter worſe by *playing* it.

I will add one thing more, That it is an Injury that deſcends to a man's Children and Poſterity; becauſe the good or ill Name of the Father is derived down to them; and many times the beſt thing he hath to leave them is the Reputation of his unblemiſh'd Virtue and Worth: And do we make no Conſcience to rob his innocent Children of the beſt part of this ſmall Patrimony, and of all the kindneſs that would have been done them for their Fathers ſake, if his Reputation had not been ſo undeſervedly ſtain'd? Is it no Crime by the breath of our mouth at once to blaſt a man's Reputation, and to ruin his Children, perhaps to all Poſterity? Can we make a jeſt of ſo ſerious a matter? Of an Injury ſo very hard to be repented of as it ought, becauſe in ſuch a Caſe no Repentance will be acceptable without Reſtitution, if it be in our power. And perhaps it will undo us in this World to make it; and if we do it not, will be our Ruin in the other.

I will put the Caſe at the beſt, that the matter of the Slander is true; yet no man's Reputation is conſiderably ſtained, tho' never ſo deſervedly, without great harm and damage to him. And it is great odds, but the matter, by paſſing through ſeveral hands, is aggravated beyond truth, every one out of his bounty being apt to add ſomething to it.

But, beſides the *Injury*, it is commonly a very high *Provocation*. And the conſequence of that may be as bad as we can imagine, and may end in dangerous and deſperate Quarrels. This reaſon the wiſe Son of *Sirach* gives why we ſhould defame no man: *Whether it be*, ſays he, *to a friend or to a foe, talk not of other mens lives. For he hath heard and obſerved thee*, Eccluſ. 19. 8, 9. that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge, *and when the time cometh he will ſhew his hatred*; that is, he will take the firſt opportunity to revenge it. At

At the beſt, it is always matter of *Grief* to the perſon that is defam'd: And *Chriſtianity*, which is the *beſt natur'd Inſtitution* in the World, forbids us the doing of thoſe things whereby we may *grieve one another*. A man's good name is a tender thing, and a wound there ſinks deep into the ſpirit even of a wiſe and good man: And the more innocent any man is in this kind, the more ſenſible is he of this hard uſage; becauſe he never treats others ſo, nor is he conſcious to himſelf that he hath deſerved it.

Secondly, The *Conſequences* of this Vice are as bad or worſe to *our ſelves*. Whoever is wont to ſpeak evil of others, gives a bad character of himſelf, even to thoſe whom he deſires to pleaſe; who, if they be wiſe enough, will conclude that he ſpeaks of them to others, as he does of others to them: And were it not for that fond partiality which men have for themſelves, no man could be ſo blind as not to ſee this.

And it is very well worthy of our conſideration, which our *Saviour* ſays in this very Caſe, That *with what meaſure we meet to others, it ſhall be meaſured to us again*, Mat. 7. and that many times *heaped up*, and *running over*. For there is hardly any thing wherein Mankind do uſe more ſtrict juſtice and equality, than *in rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing*.

Nay, Revenge often goes further than Words. A reproachful and ſlanderous Speech hath coſt many a man a *Duel*, and in that the loſs of his own Life, or the Murther of another, perhaps with the loſs of his own Soul: And I have often wonder'd that among *Chriſtians* this matter is no more laid to heart.

And tho' neither of theſe great miſchiefs ſhould happen to us, yet this may be inconvenient enough many other ways. For no man knows in the chance of things, and the mutability of humane affairs, whoſe kindneſs and good-will he may come to ſtand in need of before he dies. So that did a man only conſult his own ſafety and quiet, he ought to refrain from *evil ſpeaking*. *What man is he*, ſaith the *Pſalmiſt*, *that deſireth life, and loveth many days, that he may ſee good: Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from ſpeaking falſhood*, Pſal. 34. 12, 13.

But there is an infinitely greater Danger hanging over

us from God. If we allow our ſelves in this evil practice, all our Religion is good for nothing. So St. *James* expreſly tells us, *If any man among you ſeemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's Religion is vain*, Jam. 1.26. And St. *Paul* puts *Slanderers* and *Revilers* amongſt thoſe that *ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God.* And our *Bleſſed Saviour* hath told us, That *by our words we ſhall be juſtified, and by our words we ſhall be condemned*, 1 *Cor.* 6. 10. To which I will add the counſel given us by the *Wiſe man*, *Refrain your tongue from back biting, for there is no word ſo ſecret that ſhall go for nought, and the mouth that ſlandereth ſlayeth the Soul*, Wiſdom of Solomon, *c.* 1. *v.* 11. I proceed in the

IVth place, to add *ſome further Arguments and Conſiderations to take men off from this Vice*: As,

Firſt, That the uſe of *Speech* is a peculiar Prerogative of Man above other Creatures, and beſtowed upon him for ſome excellent end and purpoſe: That by this *Faculty* we might communicate our thoughts more eaſily to one another, and conſult together for our mutual comfort and benefit: Not to enable us to be hurtful and injurious, but helpful and beneficial to one another. The *Pſalmiſt*, as by *Interpreters* is generally thought, calls our *Tongue* our *Glory*; therewith we *praiſe God* and *bleſs Men*. Now to *bleſs* is to ſpeak well of any, and to wiſh them well. So that we pervert the uſe of *Speech*, and turn our *glory* into ſhame, when we abuſe this *Faculty* to the injury and reproach of any.

Secondly, Conſider how cheap a kindneſs it is to ſpeak well, at leaſt not to ſpeak ill of any. A good word is an eaſie obligation, but not to ſpeak ill requires only our Silence, which coſts us nothing. Some inſtances of Charity are chargeable, as to relieve the wants and neceſſities of others: The expence deterrs many from this kind of Charity. But were a man never ſo covetous, he might afford another man his good word; at leaſt he might refrain from ſpeaking ill of him; eſpecially if it be conſider'd how dear many have paid for a ſlanderous and reproachful word.

Thirdly, Conſider that no quality doth ordinarily recommend one more to the favour and good will of men, than to be free from this Vice. Every one deſires ſuch a man's friendſhip, and is apt to repoſe a great truſt and con-

confidence in him : And when he is dead, men will praiſe him ; and next to Piety towards God, and Righteouſneſs to Men, nothing is thought a more ſignificant commendation, than that he was never, or very rarely, heard to ſpeak ill of any. It was a ſingular Character of a *Roman Gentleman*, *Neſcivit quid eſſet maledicere*, *He knew not what it was to give any man an ill word.*

Fourthly, Let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and conſider how himſelf is apt to be affected with this uſage. Speak thy Conſcience *Man*, and ſay whether, as bad as thou art, thou wouldſt not be glad to have every man's, eſpecially every good man's good word? And to have thy faults conceal'd, and not to be hardly ſpoken of, tho' it may be not altogether without truth, by thoſe whom thou didſt never offend by word or deed? But with what face or reaſon doſt thou expect this from others, to whom thy carriage hath been ſo contrary? Nothing ſurely is more equal and reaſonable than that known *Rule*, *What thou wouldſt have no man do to thee*, *that do thou to no man.*

Fifthly, When you are going to ſpeak reproachfully of others, conſider whether you do not lie open to juſt reproach in the ſame, or ſome other kind. Therefore give no Occaſion, no Example of this barbarous uſage of one another. There are very few ſo innocent and free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be obnoxious to reproach upon one account or other; even the wiſeſt, and moſt virtuous, and moſt perfect among men have ſome little vanity, or affectation, which lays them open to the railery of a mimical and malicious Wit : Therefore we ſhould often turn our thoughts upon our ſelves, and look into that part of the *Wallet* which men commonly fling over their ſhoulders and keep behind them, that they may not ſee their own Faults : And when we have ſearched that well, let us remember our *Saviour's Rule*, *He that is without ſin*, *let him caſt the firſt ſtone.*

Laſtly conſider, That it is in many Caſes as great a Charity to conceal the evil you hear and know of others, as if you relieved them in a great neceſſity. And we think him a hard-hearted man that will not beſtow a ſmall Alms upon one in great want. It is an excellent Advice which the Son of *Sirach* gives to this purpoſe ; *Talk not of other mens lives ;*

lives: If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee; and be bold it will not burst thee, Eccles. 19. 10. I shall in the

V*th* and *last* place, *gives some Rules and Directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil among men.*

First, Never say any evil of any man, but what you certainly know. When ever you positively accuse and *endite* any man of any *Crime*, tho' it be in private and among Friends, speak as if you were upon your *Oath*, because God sees and hears you. This not only Charity, but Justice and regard to truth do demand of us. He that easily credits an ill Report is almost as faulty as the first inventer of it. For tho' you do not make, yet you commonly propagate a *Lye*. Therefore never speak evil of any upon *common Fame*, which for the most part is false, but almost always uncertain whether it be true or not.

Not but that it is a fault, in most Cases, to report the evil of men which is true, and which we certainly know to be so: But if I cannot prevail to make men wholly to abstain from this fault, I would be glad to compound with some Persons, and to gain this point of them however; because it would retrench *nine* parts in *ten* of the *evil speaking* that is in the World.

Secondly, Before you speak evil of any man, consider whether he hath not obliged you by some real kindness, and then it is a bad return to speak ill of him who hath done us good. Consider also, whether you may not come hereafter to be acquainted with him, related to him, or obliged by him whom you have thus injured? And how will you then be ashamed when you reflect upon it, and perhaps have reason also to believe that he to whom you have done this Injury is not ignorant of it?

Consider likewise, whether in the change of humane affairs, you may not some time or other come to stand in need of his favour; and how incapable this carriage of yours towards him will render you of it? And whether it may not be in his power to revenge a spiteful and needless word by a shrewd turn? So that if a man made no conscience of hurting others, yet he should in prudence have some consideration of himself.

Thirdly, Let us accustom our selves to pity the Faults of men, and to be truly sorry for them, and then we shall

take no pleaſure in publiſhing them. And this common Humanity requires of us, conſidering the great infirmities of humane Nature, and that we our ſelves alſo are liable to be tempted: Conſidering likewiſe, how ſevere a Puniſhment every fault and miſcarriage is to it ſelf; and how terribly it expoſeth a man to the wrath of God, both in this World and the other. He is not a good *Chriſtian*, that is not heartily ſorry for the faults even of his greateſt enemies; and if he be ſo, he will diſcover them no further than is neceſſary to ſome good end.

Fourthly, When ever we hear any man evil-ſpoken of, if we know any good of him let us ſay *that*. It is always the more humane and the more honourable part to ſtand up in the defence and vindication of others, than to accuſe and beſpatter them. Poſſibly the good you heard of them may not be true, but it is much more probable that the evil which you have heard of them is not true neither: However, it is better to preſerve the Credit of a bad man, than to ſtain the Reputation of the innocent. And if there were any need that a man ſhould be evil-ſpoken of, it is but fair and equal that his good and bad Qualities ſhould be mention'd together; otherwiſe he may be ſtrangely miſrepreſented; and an indifferent Man may be made a Monſter.

They that will obſerve nothing in a Wiſe man, but his over-ſights and follies; nothing in a Good man, but his failings and infirmities; may make a ſhift to render a very wiſe and good man very deſpicable. If one ſhould heap together all the paſſionate Speeches, all the froward and imprudent Actions of the beſt man; all that he had ſaid or done amiſs in his whole Life, and preſent it all at one view, concealing his Wiſdom and Vertues; the man in this Diſguiſe would look like a *Mad man* or a *Fury*. And yet if his Life were fairly repreſented, and juſt in the ſame manner it was led; and his many and great Virtues ſet over-againſt his failings and infirmities, he would appear to all the World to be an admirable and excellent Perſon. But how many and great ſoever any man's ill Qualities are, it is but juſt that with all this heavy load of faults he ſhould have the due praiſe of the few real Virtues that are in him.

Fifthly, That you may not ſpeak ill of any, do not de-

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light to hear ill of them. Give no countenance to *Buſy-bodies*, and thoſe that love to talk of other mens Faults: Or if you cannot decently reprove them becauſe of their Quality, then divert the diſcourſe ſome other way; or if you cannot do that, by ſeeming not to mind it, you may ſufficiently ſignifie that you do not like it,

Sixthly, Let every man mind himſelf, and his own Duty and Concernment. Do but endeavour in good earneſt to mend thy ſelf, and it will be work enough for one Man, and leave thee but little time to talk of others. When *Plato* withdrew from the Court of *Dionyſius*, who would fain have had a famous *Philoſopher* for his Flatterer, they parted in ſome unkindneſs, and *Dionyſius* bad him not to ſpeak ill of him when he was return'd into *Greece*; *Plato* told him, *he had no leiſure for it*; meaning that he had better things to mind, than to take up his thoughts and talk with the faults of ſo bad a man, ſo notoriouſly known to all the World.

Laſtly, Let us ſet a watch before the door of our lips, and not ſpeak but upon conſideration: I do not mean to ſpeak *finely*, but *fitly*. Eſpecially when thou ſpeakeſt of others, conſider of *whom*, and *what* thou art going to ſpeak: Uſe great Caution and Circumſpection in this matter: Look well about thee; on every ſide of the thing, and on every Perſon in the Company, before thy words ſlip from thee; which when they are once out of thy lips, are for ever out of thy power.

Not that men ſhould be ſullen in company, and ſay nothing; or ſo ſtiff in converſation, as to drop nothing but *Aphoriſms* and *Oracles*: Eſpecially, among Equals and Friends, we ſhould not be ſo reſerved as if we would have it taken for a mighty favour that we vouchſafe to ſay any thing. If a Man had the underſtanding of an *Angel*, he muſt be contented to abate ſomething of this exceſs of *Wiſdom*, for fear of being thought *Cunning*. The true Art of Converſation, if any body can hit upon it, ſeems to be this; an appearing freedom and openneſs, with a reſolute reſervedneſs as little appearing as is poſſible.

All that I mean by this *Caution* is, that we ſhould conſider well what we ſay, eſpecially of others. And to this end we ſhould endeavour to get our minds furniſh'd with

matter of Diſcourſe concerning things uſeful in themſelves, and not hurtful to others: And, if we have but a Mind wiſe enough, and good enough, we may eaſily find a Field large enough for innocent Converſation; ſuch as will harm no body, and yet be acceptable enough to the better and wiſer part of Mankind: And why ſhould any one be at the coſt of playing the fool to gratifie any body whatſoever?

I have done with the *Five* things I propounded to ſpeak to upon this Argument. But becauſe hardly any thing can be ſo clear, but ſomething may be ſaid againſt it; nor any thing ſo bad, but ſomething may be pleaded in excuſe for it: I ſhall therefore take notice of two or three *Pleas* that may be made for it.

Firſt, Some pretend mighty injury and provocation. If in the ſame kind, it ſeems thou art ſenſible of it; and therefore thou of all men oughteſt to abſtain from it: But in what kind ſoever it be, the Chriſtian Religion forbids Revenge. Therefore do not plead one Sin in excuſe of another, and make *Revenge* an Apology for *Reviling*.

Secondly, It is alledged by others, with a little better grace, that if this Doctrine were practiſed, Converſation would be ſpoil'd, and there would not be matter enough for pleaſant diſcourſe and entertainment.

I anſwer, The deſign of this Diſcourſe is to redreſs a great evil in Converſation, and that I hope which mends it will not ſpoil it. And however, if mens Tongues lay a little more ſtill, and moſt of us ſpake a good deal leſs than we do, both of our ſelves and others, I ſee no great harm in it: I hope we might for all that live comfortably and in good health, and ſee many good days. *David*, I am ſure, preſcribes it as an excellent *Receipt*, in his Opinion, for a quiet, and cheerful, and long Life, to refrain from evil-ſpeaking; Pſal. 34. 12, 13. *What man is he that deſireth life, and loveth many days that he may ſee good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from ſpeaking falſhood.*

But granting that there is ſome pleaſure in *Invective*, I hope there is a great deal more in *Innocence*! And the more any man conſiders this, the truer he will find it; and whenever we are ſerious, we our ſelves cannot but acknowledge it. When a man examines himſelf impartially before the *Sacrament*, or is put in mind upon a *Death-bed* to make reparation for Injuries done in this kind, he will then certainly be of this mind,

and

and wish he had not done them. For this certainly is one necessary qualification for the *Blessed Sacrament*, that we *be in love and charity with our neighbours*; with which temper of mind this quality is utterly inconsistent.

Thirdly, There is yet a more specious *Plea* than either of the former, that men will be encouraged to do ill if they can escape the tongues of men; as they would do, if this Doctrine did effectually take place: Because by this means one great restraint from doing evil would be taken away, which these good men who are so bent upon reforming the World, think would be great pity. For many who will venture upon the displeasure of God, will yet abstain from doing bad things for fear of reproach from men: Besides, that this seems the most proper punishment of many Faults which the Laws of Men can take no notice of.

Admitting all this to be true, yet it does not seem so good and laudable a way to punish one fault by another. But let no man encourage himself in an evil way with this hope, that he shall escape the censure of men: When I have said all I can, there will, I fear, be evil-speaking enough in the World to chastise them that do ill: And tho' we should hold our peace, there will be bad tongues enow to reproach men with their evil-doings. I wish we could but be persuaded to make the Experiment for a little while, whether men would not be sufficiently lash'd for their Faults, tho' we sate by and said nothing.

So that there is no need at all that good men should be concern'd in this odious Work. There will always be Offenders and *Malefactors* enow to be the *Executioners* to inflict this punishment upon one another. Therefore let no man presume upon Impunity on the one hand; and on the other, let no man despair but that this business will be sufficiently done one way or other. I am very much mistaken, if we may not safely trust an ill-natur'd World that there will be no failure of Justice in this kind.

And here, if I durst, I would fain have said a word or two concerning that more publick sort of *Obloquy* by *Lampoons* and *Libels*, so much in fashion in this witty Age. But I have no mind to provoke a very terrible sort of men. Yet thus much I hope may be said without offence, that how much soever men are pleas'd to see others abused in this kind, yet it is always grievous when it comes to their own turn: However I cannot but hope that every man that impartially considers must own it to be a fault of a very high nature to revile those whom God hath placed in Authority over us, and *to slander the foot-*

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ſteps of the Lord's Anointed: Eſpecially ſince it is ſo expreſly written, *Thou ſhalt not ſpeak evil of the Rulers of thy People.*

Having repreſented the great evil of this Vice, it might not now be improper to ſay ſomething to thoſe who ſuffer by it. Are we guilty of the evil ſaid of us? Let us reform, and cut off all occaſions for the future; and ſo turn the malice of our Enemies to our own advantage, and defeat their ill intentions by making ſo good an uſe of it: And then it will be well for us to have been evil ſpoken of.

Are we innocent? We may ſo much the better bear it patiently; imitating herein the Pattern of our *Bleſſed Saviour, Who when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himſelf to him that judgeth righteouſly.*

We may conſider likewiſe, that tho' it be a mis-fortune to be evil ſpoken of, it is their fault that do it, and not ours; and therefore ſhould not put us into Paſſion, becauſe another man's being injurious to me is no good reaſon why I ſhould be uneaſie to my ſelf. We ſhould not revenge the injuries done to us, no not upon them that do them, much leſs upon our ſelves. Let no man's Provocation make thee to loſe thy Patience. Be not ſuch a fool, as to part with any one Virtue becauſe ſome men are ſo malicious as to endeavour to rob thee of the Reputation of all the reſt. When men ſpeak ill of thee, do as *Plato* ſaid he would do in that caſe; *Live ſo, as that no body may believe them.*

All that now remains is to reflect upon what hath been ſaid, and to urge you and my ſelf to do accordingly. For all is nothing, if we do not practiſe what we ſo plainly ſee to be our Duty. Many are ſo taken up with the deep *Points* and *Myſteries* of Religion, that they never think of the common *Duties* and *Offices* of human Life. But *Faith* and a *good Life* are ſo far from claſhing with one another, that the *Chriſtian Religion* hath made them inſeparable. True *Faith* is neceſſary in order to a *good Life*, and a *good Life* is the genuine product of a *right Belief*; and therefore the *one* never ought to be preſs'd to the prejudice of the *other*.

I foreſee what will be ſaid, becauſe I have heard it ſo often ſaid in the like caſe; that there is *not one word of Jeſus Chriſt in all this*. No more is there in the *Text*. And yet I hope that *Jeſus Chriſt* is truly preach'd, whenever his *Will* and *Laws*, and the *Duties* enjoin'd by the *Chriſtian Religion* are inculcated upon us.

But ſome men are pleaſed to ſay, that *this is mere Morality*: I anſwer, that this is *Scripture-Morality* and *Chriſtian-Morality*, and who hath any thing to ſay againſt *that*? Nay,

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I will go yet further, that no man ought to pretend to believe the *Chriſtian Religion*, who lives in the neglect of ſo plain a *Duty*; and in the practice of a *Sin* ſo clearly condemn'd by it, as this of *evil-ſpeaking* is.

But becauſe *the Word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than a two-edged Sword*, yea ſharper than *Calumny* it ſelf; and pierceth the very Hearts and Conſciences of men, laying us open to our ſelves, and convincing us of our more ſecret, as well as our more viſible Faults; I ſhall therefore at one view repreſent to you what is diſperſedly ſaid concerning this *Sin* in the *Holy Word of God*.

And I have purpoſely reſerved this to the laſt, becauſe it is more perſuaſive and penetrating than any Humane Diſcourſe. And to this end be pleas'd to conſider in what company the *Holy Ghoſt* doth uſually mention this *Sin*. There is ſcarce any *black Catalogue* of *Sins* in the *Bible* but we find this among them; in the company of the very worſt *Actions* and moſt irregular *Paſſions* of men. *Out of the heart*, ſays our *Saviour*, Mat. 15. 19. *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, falſe witneſs, evil ſpeakings*. And the *Apoſtle*, Rom. 1. 29. ranks *back-biters* with *fornicators*, and *murderers*, and *haters of God*; and with thoſe of whom it is expreſly ſaid, 1 *Cor.* 6. 10. that *they ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God*.

And when he enumerates the Sins of *the laſt times*, 2 Tim. 3. 2, 3. *Men*, ſays he, *ſhall be lovers of themſelves, covetous, boaſters, evil-ſpeakers, without natural affection, perfidious, falſe accuſers*, &c. And which is the ſtrangeſt of all, they who are ſaid to be guilty of theſe great Vices and Enormities are noted by the *Apoſtle* to be great pretenders to Religion; for ſo it follows in the next words, *Having a form of godlineſs, but denying the power thereof*. So that it is no new thing for men to make a more than ordinary profeſſion of *Chriſtianity*, and yet at the ſame time to live in a moſt palpable contradiction to the Precepts of that *Holy Religion*: As if any pretence to *Myſtery*, and I know not what extraordinary *attainments* in the knowledge of *Chriſt*, could exempt men from obedience to his Laws, and ſet them above the Vertues of a good Life.

And now after all this, do we hardly think *that* to be a Sin, which is in *Scripture* ſo frequently rank'd with *Murther* and *Adultery* and the *blackeſt Crimes*; ſuch as are inconſiſtent with the life and power of Religion, and will certainly ſhut men out of the Kingdom of God? Do we believe the *Bible* to be the *Word of God*? and can we allow our ſelves in the common practice of a *Sin*, than which there is hardly any fault of mens Lives more frequently mention'd, more ſeverely reprov'd, and more odiouſly branded in that *Holy Book*. Con-

Conſider ſeriouſly theſe *Texts*, Pſal. 15. 1. *Who ſhall abide in thy Tabernacle, who ſhall dwell in thy holy Hill? He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach againſt his neighbour.* Have ye never heard what our *Saviour* ſays, that *of every idle word we muſt give an account in the day of Judgment*; that *by thy words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy words thou ſhalt be condemn'd*? What can be more ſevere than that of St. *James*? *If any man among you ſeemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's Religion is vain.*

To conclude: The *Sin* which I have now warned men againſt, is plainly condemn'd by the *Word of God*; and the *Duty* which I have now been perſuading you to, is eaſie for every man to underſtand, not hard for any man, that can but reſolve to keep a good guard upon himſelf for ſome time, by the grace of God to practice; and moſt reaſonable for all *Men*, but eſpecially for all *Chriſtians*, to obſerve. It is as eaſie as a *reſolute ſilence* upon juſt occaſion, as reaſonable as *prudence* and *juſtice* and *charity*, and the preſervation of *peace* and *good-will* among men, can make it; and of as neceſſary and indiſpenſible an obligation, as the Authority of God can render any thing.

Upon all which Conſiderations, let us every one of us be perſuaded to take up *David*'s deliberate Reſolution, *Pſal.* 39. 1. *I ſaid, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue.* And I do verily believe, that would we but heartily endeavour to amend this one Fault, we ſhould ſoon be better Men in our whole lives: I mean, that the correcting of this *Vice*, together with thoſe that are nearly allied to it, and may at the ſame time, and almoſt with the ſame reſolution and care be corrected, would make us Owners of a great many conſiderable Vertues, and carry us on a good way towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagin'd that a man that makes conſcience of his *Words* ſhould not take an equal or a greater care of his *Actions*. And this I take to be both the true meaning, and the true reaſon of that ſaying of St. *James*, and with which I ſhall conclude: *If any man offend not in Word, the ſame is a perfect man.*

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlaſting Covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, to do his will; working in you always that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt; To whom be glory for ever, *Amen.*